

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 171722Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3520

INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 3609

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SS, AG, MR, MR, SP

SUBJECT: SAHARA

1. SAW ABERKANE, DIRECTOR AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS AT FOREIGN MINISTRY ON DECEMBER 16. TOLD HIM I THOUGHT OUR VOTE FOR TUNISIAN-SENEGALESE RESOLUTION AT UN WAS UNDERSTANDABLE IN CIRCUMSTANCES. FOR ONE THING, ALGERIA WAS NOT REPRESENTED IN WASHINGTON AND HAD ABANDONED THE FIELD TO THE MOROCCANS, WHO HAD AN EFFECTIVE RESIDENT AMBASSADOR IN CONTACT WITH DECISION MAKERS. IN SECOND PLACE, WE HAD MADE SINCERE EFFORT TO MAINTAIN NEUTRALITY AND HAD REFUSED NUMBER MOROCCAN REQUESTS FOR MORE POSITIVE SUPPORT, BUT PRESIDENT BOUMEDIENE'S REPEATED REMARKS TO ME THAT WE WERE NOT BEING NEUTRAL HAD CREATED UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION THAT WE ALREADY CONDEMNED BY ALGERIA. THIS HAD COME AT A TIME WHEN WE WERE FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN FRIENDS. WE HAD TRIED TO MAINTAIN BALANCE BUT HE SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT AMERICANS, LIKE ALGERIANS, WERE WILLING TO PUT UP WITH SOMETHING FOR ONLY A CERTAIN LENGTH OF TIME BEFORE SAYING, "TO HELL WITH IT."

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2. ABERKANE SEEMED SOMEWHAT PENSIVE BUT WAS QUITE FRIENDLY. HE SAID ALGERIANS HAD KNOWN THEIR RESOLUTION WOULD PASS BUT HAD HOPED THE PRO-MOROCCAN ONE WOULD BE DEFEATED. HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM DJIJEL (HIS HOME TOWN) AND FOUND PEOPLE THERE VERY WORKED UP ABOUT THE SAHARA AND TALKING OF GOING TO WAR. IT WAS ALL THE OLD MOUJAHIDIN COULD TALK ABOUT, ALL OF THEM POINTING OUT THAT THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN OF THE SAHARA WAS IDEAL FOR GUERILLA WARFARE AND THAT THE ALGERIANS HAD MUCH EXPERIENCE IN THAT RESPECT.

3. I SAID IT WOULD BE MOST REGRETTABLE IF ALGERIA WENT TO WAR OVER THE SAHARA. IT WOULD COST MONEY AND MANY LIVES WHICH ALGERIA COULD ILL AFFORD TO LOSE. WAS THERE NOT SOME POSSIBILITY OF MEDIATION BY SOMEONE?

4. ABERKANE SAID MEDIATION WOULD IMPLY A SETTLEMENT UNDER WHICH ALGERIANS WOULD ACCEPT FAIT ACCOMPLI. THIS THEY WOULD NEVER DO. THEY WOULD CONTINUE THE FIGHT AS LONG AS NECESSARY.

5. I ASKED WHAT THEY EXPECTED TO HAPPEN MILITARILY. HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. HE DID NOT THINK THERE WOULD BE A CLASH BETWEEN THE MOROCCAN AND ALGERIAN ARMIES UNLESS THE FORMER TRIED TO CLOSE THE ROUTES INTO THE SAHARA, WHICH THEY HAD NOT YET DONE. THE POLISARIO STILL HELD MAHBES, WHICH THE MOROCCANS HAD NOT YET TRIED TO TAKE.

6. COMMENT: I DISCUSSED VARIOUS BILATERAL MATTERS WITH ABERKANE AND HE ACTED AS THOUGH THERE NO OBSTACLE TO CONTINUED COOPERATION IN ECONOMIC FIELDS. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THIS WILL IN FACT BE THE CASE, BUT I AM ENCOURAGED BY MILDNESS OF ALGERIAN REACTION TO DATE. AS NOTED IN EARLIER TELEGRAM (NOTAL), MILDNESS MAY BE EXPLAINED BY FACT SPANISH HAVE DENIED TO ALGERIANS ALLEGATIONS THAT WE PUT PRESSURE ON THEM TO ACCEDE TO MOROCCAN DEMANDS. ABERKANE SAID DENIAL WAS MADE BY SPANISH FOREIGN MINISTER TO ALGERIAN DELEGATION ATTENDING FRANCO FUNERAL. MINISTER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD BOUMEDIENE HAD MADE SUCH ALLEGATIONS TO SENATOR FULBRIGHT
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BUT THAT THEY WERE NOT TRUE. ASSUME THIS DENIAL WAS RESULT OF CONVERSATION AMBASSADOR STABLER AND I HAD WITH ROVIRA ON NOVEMBER 19. PARKER

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